

Module #2, Section A, Handout 1

Early Republican Literature: Origins of Roman Literature and Early Roman Theater

❖ The Origin of Roman Literature

Influence of Greek literature, epic poetry and drama in particular, on Roman literature.

240 BC: commonly accepted "DATE OF BIRTH" of Roman Literature, as mentioned in the ancient sources - it is the year when Livius Andronicus wrote and put on stage one of his dramas.

According to the ancient Romans, before 240 BC, they did not write literary texts (for ex. poems, plays, novels, etc.).

The first Latin writer

LIVIVS ANDRONICVS (3rd century BC)

wrote tragedies and comedies that were adaptations of Greek ones
translated the *Odyssey* from Greek into Latin

The first Roman writer

Gnaeus NAEVIUS (270?-201 BC)

wrote ***Bellum Poenicum*** (*The Punic War*): national epic poem (history + myth) on the first Punic war, wrote also tragedies and comedies

The "Father" of Latin Literature

Quintus ENNIUS (239-169 BC)

wrote ***Annales*** (*Annals*): epic poem on history of Rome from foundation to Ennius' time
wrote also tragedies and comedies

❖ The Early Roman Theater

- **Before 240 BC: Native Italian drama - No written evidence survive, possibly plays not written down, but somehow improvised?:**
- **After 240 BC (to ca. 120 BC): adaptations of Greek Comedies (*fabulae palliatae*)**

Theatrical Performances

- Public theatrical performances (*ludi scaenici*): by whom were they sponsored and on which occasion?
- Structure of the theater: temporary vs. permanent
stage building, *cavea*, *orchestra*
first permanent theater built in Rome in 55 BC
- Actors (who were they?) and use of masks